

communication; one of the most exceptional features of the modern era of telecommunications, television and video is that the arts are now becoming the *dominant* means of communication. Corporations talk of building an "image;" political parties spend millions to develop the film that will present their presidential candidate at the national convention; consultants advise public speakers that 90 percent of the message they convey will be visual, rather than verbal; signs posted in public places and buttons in automobiles are labeled using internationally understood symbols rather than words; advertisers craft powerful commercial messages that involve little text or, in some cases, no words at all. As Marshall McLuhan wrote, "the medium is the message" – and the arts are the media.

Arts experiences and aesthetic decisions are a pervasive part of daily life. Many experiences are overtly artistic, such as listening to music on the radio or enjoying the architecture of a building. An even greater number of experiences are less overtly artistic but, nevertheless, involve making aesthetic choices, such as when selecting clothing or decorating a home.

There is no business in the United States that is not, in some way, dependent on the arts.⁷

– Carol Sterling, quoted in *Education Week*

The arts play a critical role in the economic and social well-being of our local communities, our state and of American society as a whole:

The arts have a positive impact not only on a community's quality of life, but also on the entire social and business fabric. Arts districts attract business investment, reverse urban decay, revitalize struggling neighborhoods and draw tourists. Attendance at arts events generates related commerce for hotels, restaurants, parking garages, galleries and more. Arts organizations themselves are responsible businesses, employers and consumers.⁸

– Carol Sterling, quoted in *Education Week*

The arts have an enormous influence on our economy, an influence that is increasing dramatically as *communications* and *multimedia* become essential vehicles for success. Recognizing and protecting intellectual property and copyrights have become key economic issues in relations between the United States and other nations. For example, the European Community insisted on protection from American media for its domestic film and

broadcast industry during negotiations for the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT),⁹ and Canada held up the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) until similar issues were resolved.

By 1995 the arts had become a \$314 billion dollar industry in the United States, or about six percent of America's gross national product, a total nearly equal to that of the construction industry. Arts and entertainment had become our nation's second strongest net export area, after aerospace products. The arts have a similarly strong economic impact in Connecticut, which relies on the strengths of its many artists and cultural institutions to draw residents, businesses and tourists to the state.¹⁰

The Value Of The Arts In Education

Because the arts fulfill a fundamental role in society and in the development of children, they also play an essential part in education. The inclusion of the arts in the school curriculum is vital if schools are to produce well-rounded students who are prepared for the 21st century. There are many important ways in which the arts contribute to a student's education.

A quality arts education:

1. provides essential ways to understand and express life experiences;
2. develops deep understanding of past and present cultures/peoples;
3. prepares students for active participation in creating the culture of the present and future;
4. develops imagination;
5. enables students to make informed aesthetic choices;
6. helps develop the full range of students' abilities;
7. prepares students for enjoyable recreation and leisure time;
8. prepares students for success in a wide variety of careers;
9. provides a creative, motivating vehicle for mastering technology, including multimedia;
10. develops self-discipline and focus;
11. develops the capacity to refine work, aspiring to high quality standards;
12. fosters creativity and independence;
13. develops the ability to solve complex, often ambiguous, problems;
14. creates a positive, inclusive school atmosphere;
15. develops teamwork;
16. enhances self-esteem; and
17. increases learning in other subjects.

The following section elaborates on the contributions of studying the arts that are listed on page 6.

A quality arts education (1) provides essential ways to understand and express life experiences.

The arts – creative writing, dance, music, theatre/film and visual arts – serve as ways that we react to, record and share our impressions of the world.... We need every possible way to represent, interpret and convey our world for a very simple but powerful reason: No one of these ways offers a full picture. Individually, mathematics, science and history convey only part of the reality of the world. Nor do the arts alone suffice. A multiplicity of symbol systems are required to provide a more complete picture and a more comprehensive education.¹⁰

– Charles Fowler

The arts provide students with essential ways of knowing and describing their world. Students learn by taking in information through their senses. Art work cultivates the direct experience of the senses.

Experiences of all kinds can be filtered through the art-making process, as students “make sense” and new form out of the raw material of experience. Arts study develops habits of sensory awareness and sharpens perception, thereby enhancing students’ capacity for learning. By helping students understand and manipulate different sensory modes – aural, kinesthetic, visual, verbal – arts education helps students find different ways of understanding their world.

Only those who understand the how’s and why’s of visual language are able to construct, control and develop a visual environment that communicates meaningfully a society’s value. [Education in art is] something we can no longer live without if we want the next generation to be able to control their own destiny.¹¹

– Howard Risatti

The arts are powerful modes of communication. For all students, the arts provide important ways of conveying thoughts; for many students the arts provide the *best* ways of expressing their ideas, in ways that are far removed from traditional academic learning methods. Artists examine experience deeply, looking for the essential qualities of that experience, and crystallize that experience in their art work. A familiar example of this may be found in the single-frame cartoon in which one

visual image and perhaps an accompanying caption encapsulates a complex political situation or provides humorous commentary on life experience. By learning to create and perform art work, students develop habits of deep examination and powerful modes of expressing what they see, hear and feel about the world. The expression “a picture is worth a thousand words” describes this capacity of the arts to express through artistic media what would be difficult, or even impossible, to express through language. The arts exist to express that which would be otherwise inexpressible.¹²

Schools must help students develop literacy in all of the media to which they are exposed in their daily lives, so that they can not only interpret and critically evaluate what they experience through media, but also express themselves through these media.

A quality arts education (2) develops deep understanding of past and present cultures/peoples.

Great nations write their autobiographies in three manuscripts: the book of their deeds, the book of their words and the book of their art. Not one of these books can be understood unless we read the two others.¹³

– John Ruskin

The arts are now, and have always been, an integral part of culture that permeates every aspect of life, from recreation to worship. Today, even as we create our own contemporary forms of artistic expression, we are able to use historical art forms as keys to comprehending how past groups perceived themselves. The arts are a primary source of reflection on what our ancestors believed and how they lived and survived.

The arts provide every ensuing generation with a connection to the past and to other cultures. The arts can personalize students’ connections with history and cultures by making them active participants in, and interpreters of, other times and societies. This personalization is an essential component for fully developing students’ understanding of cultural and historical context. Students’ identification with their own nation and culture is also enhanced through participation in our dance, music, theatre and visual arts heritage.

The arts also provide a common form of communication for peoples who do not speak the same language or hold the same political beliefs. The United States provides a vast resource of culturally diverse arts experiences which can be used to help us understand ourselves and others. The extent to which we educate our citizens to a heightened awareness of how different peoples think and act will influence whether our nation continues to play a leadership role in the world of the 21st century.

A quality arts education (3) prepares students for active participation in creating the culture of the past and present.

By understanding the art works of the past and present, students can enjoy and be enriched by their culture. Interacting with the arts as an audience member is an important form of recreation. Whether listening to music, watching television or looking at buildings out an office window, the typical citizen spends hours listening to and viewing the arts.

Passive response to culture is not, however, an adequate goal for educated citizens, because culture is not and should not be static. There was a time in the past when, in order to be surrounded by art, people had to create or perform their own. For example, prior to the development of the portable radio an individual who wanted to take a walk accompanied by music had to sing or play an instrument. The invention of technologies for recording and reproducing the arts (photograph, phonograph, film) have weakened the motivation for such spontaneous art making. Although there are many benefits from increased access to digital images and sounds afforded by modern technology, there is a risk that citizens will settle for becoming passive recipients of the arts rather than actively participating in their creation and performance.

Schools must prepare every student to contribute actively to contemporary culture as a doer — a creator or performer — of one or more art forms. Regardless of whether involved for profit or recreation, each child must learn to play some active role, such as by acting in a community theatre guild, performing in a community band or chorus, dancing recreationally or painting for personal satisfaction. Only then will America's culture pass on a dynamic legacy of expanded and improved civilization to future generations.

A quality arts education (4) develops imagination.

Imagination is more important than knowledge.¹⁴

— Albert Einstein, scientist

The arts cultivate imagination, which is the capacity for forming mental images. Thinking — sometimes referred to as *cognition* — takes place in many forms, only one of which is verbal. Imagination in a variety of modes, such as those used by the different art forms is, therefore, an essential part not only of the artistic process, but of the basic thinking process.

The best way to ensure meaningless verbal learning in a school is to make sure that youngsters have no image with which to relate the terms that they are

learning; images populate our conceptual life.¹⁵

— Elliot W. Eisner

Imagination is essential for understanding in a variety of situations, such as when reading or listening. For example, successful reading requires imagination, because to understand the reader must create mental images of the characters and events described in the text. Similarly, students must create mental images to solve mathematical problems, such as when calculating the surface area of a geometric shape.

Pyramids, cathedrals and rockets exist not because of geometry, theories of structures or thermodynamics, but because they were first a picture — literally a vision — in the minds of those who built them.¹⁶

— Eugene Ferguson, historian

Students also need imagination to improve their world. Imagination is necessary to envision new possibilities. The visionary leader is one who imagines possibilities that do not exist and helps others to work toward those possibilities. Developing such visions of a better future and helping others to share in those visions will be essential to create a successful 21st century.

Study of the arts develops students' imaginations. Artists envision possibilities that do not exist and present them to others through a variety of media. By developing and nurturing the imagination, arts education helps students become better learners and prepares them to participate in fashioning a better future.

A quality arts education (5) enables students to make informed aesthetic choices.

Aesthetics, the philosophy of art, is, in simplest terms, the study of what is beautiful; in a broader sense, it prepares students to recognize and value quality. In terms of arts education, aesthetics deals with important questions as general as "what is art?" and as specific as "in this song, what is the relationship between the music and the text?"

Aesthetics is an essential element of thinking skills programs. ... Aesthetics, as used here, means sensitivity to the artistic features of the environment and the qualities of experience that evoke feelings in individuals. Such feelings include enjoyment, exhilaration, awe and satisfaction. Thus, aesthetics is the sensitive beginning of rational thought, which leads to enlightenment about the complexities of our